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**Advisory Council on the Status of Women  
Conseil consultatif sur la condition de la femme**

The New Brunswick Advisory Council  
on the  
Status of Women

Presentation to the House of Commons  
Standing Committee on Secretary of State  
Women's Program

Halifax  
April 14, 1987

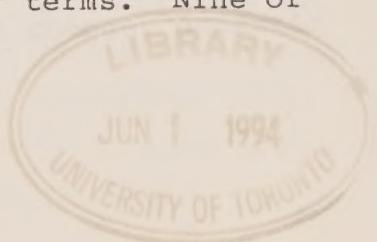


The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women notes that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1979, and ratified by Canada in December, 1981. The Council further notes that equality of status between the sexes is guaranteed by Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the New Constitution of Canada, which came into force in 1985. The Secretary of State Women's Program, by supporting women's voluntary organizations working towards the improved status of women in Canadian society, reflects the commitment of the present government of Canada, and of the two other major political parties, to equality for Canadian women.

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women is in full support of the continuance, and indeed, of the strengthening of the Secretary of State Women's Program. During the past fifteen years women of the province have worked together towards equal participation in New Brunswick society and have made many gains. However, social change that affects well-entrenched social practice and institutions does not occur easily or quickly. The women of our province have set their course on a road that is long and hard. The support provided by the Secretary of State Women's Program is an integral part of our progress along that road.

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The role of the Advisory Council, which was created in 1978, is to advise the government on women's issues and to bring before the government and the public, matters of concern to women. The Council is composed of twelve members, including a full-time chairperson, who are appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council for three-year terms. Nine of





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the fifteen New Brunswick counties are represented, as well as both official language groups, native women and immigrant women. Although the Council itself does not receive Women's Program funds, it is in constant communication with the women of New Brunswick, through Council members, through public meetings and through the Council's toll-free line, that can be accessed from anywhere in the province. The Council is therefore familiar with many groups who have received Women's Program support.

Since its creation, the Council has made recommendations to government in several areas. Pensions, Day Care, Early Childhood Development, Education, Employment Standards, Health, Pornography and Violence Against Women are but a few examples. We are pleased to report some progress and action in these areas, for example:

1. Legislation governing private pensions is in the consultative process and is expected to become statute within 3 to 4 years. The proposed legislation meets most Council recommendations with regard to portability of pensions, vesting provisions and survivorship benefits.
2. Day care subsidies for needy parents have increased since 1978, the number of day care spaces has increased, and in 1985 regulations on standards governing first aid, staff supervision, food service and fire safety were set up.
3. In the area of employment standards, some protection of agricultural workers now exists and maternity leave is now set at 17 weeks. The Employment Standards Act is now under review and as a result we can expect better protection under provincial law with regard to technological change, domestic work, part-time work and maternity.

4. In the area of health, in 1978 the Alcohol and Drug Dependency Commission appointed a coordinator of women's programs and the last decade has seen an increase in the number of treatment and rehabilitation beds for women. Since 1982, eight reproductive health clinics have been opened. The Department of Health and Community Services is not unreceptive to the investigation of the feasibility of midwifery practice in the province.

5. In the area of violence against women, transition houses have been established in three cities and five emergency shelters exist. Counselling services for batterers exist in three cities as well.

6. The Vital Statistics Act has been amended so that parents now have the freedom to choose the surname of their newborn children. Either the father's name, the mother's name or a hyphenated name may be used.

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It is the Council's position that many of the problems faced by women of the province relate to their unequal economic position and lack of participation in the political process and related decision-making. Only when women achieve progress in these areas can they begin to eliminate discriminatory social practice and the myriad of problems that are symptomatic of their unequal, dependent position.

Although the educational levels of women in New Brunswick are on a par with those of men, and although the labour force participation rate of women more than doubled between 1956 and 1983, their share of the economic benefits of work have not progressed apace. The "Pay Gap" is alive and well in New Brunswick, as the figures below show:

Selected Income Statistics, 1981 Census

	Women	Men
	%	%
No Income	28	9
Employment Income:		
less than \$10,000	71	40
gtr than \$15,000	10	41
gtr than \$25,000	00.8	6

According to the most recent available census data (1981), the average income of a woman in New Brunswick - and this includes salary, interest, pensions, family allowance, business income, etc - was 51.8 % of the average income of men (\$6,897 vs. \$13,315).

Twice as many women than men work in Sales, Clerical and Services, occupational fields that are characterized by low pay, low status and little room for career advancement.

However even women in the same occupational categories still have much lower earnings than men, as the figures below demonstrate.

Average Earnings for Selected Occupations  
New Brunswick 1985

	Men	Women	Women's Earnings As Percentage of Men's
	\$	\$	%
<b>Office</b>			
Accounting Clerk	437/wk	308/wk	70
Junior Gen'l			
Office Clerk	377	307	81
Junior Office			
Manager	570	464	81
Senior Programmer	594	546	92
Systems Analyst, Snr	669	589	88
Telephone Operator	322	297	92
<b>Retail</b>			
Salesperson Class A	7.37/hr	5.37/hr	73
Salesperson Class C	8.73	5.98	68
<b>Hospitals</b>			
Cook Helper	346/wk	301/wk	87
Housekeeping Aide	328	299	91

The Pay Gap is evident in the professions as well. Women in management and administrative positions earned 52% of what men in those positions earned.

At the same time, the traditional family - mother at home, father as sole breadwinner and children - represents an ever diminishing proportion of New Brunswick families.

In 1981 the incidence of lone parent families was 12.2% of all families in New Brunswick. This figure represents 21,480 families - the second highest provincial rate in Canada. It also represents a 33% increase from 1976 when there were 16,160 lone parent families in the province. Women make up the vast majority of lone parents and a high percentage of these women are on social assistance.

\* \* \*

It is our contention that the low economic status of women and their economic dependence is reflected in the social problems that the Council has identified and researched, and on which the government has been petitioned:

1. The Council maintains that the incidence of family violence is related directly to the social, economic and political position of women in society. In our province transition houses are often full, some have waiting lists and in large areas of the province they are still non-existent. Work on prevention is needed, as well as a province-wide network of transition houses, a crisis line and a clear commitment to treat these services as essential.

2. The reported incidence of child abuse, both sexual and physical, as well as general neglect of children, increases every year in New Brunswick and community services workers and administrators are aware of only scratching the surface in this area. Although provision of services to victims is extremely important, the Council believes that the unequal and dependent position of women in society is a major factor in the persistent increase of this heinous act. Child abuse often goes hand in hand with wife abuse and women often stay with abusers because they have no choice.

3. The many recommendations made by the Advisory Council to control the widespread availability of pornographic materials in the province have not resulted in substantial changes. The basic elements of pornography - the objectification and degradation of women, the endorsement of power imbalance and abuse, female masochism - are reflective of women's dependent position in society.

\* \* \*

We bring up these issues to demonstrate that indeed we have a long way to go in our promotion of full equality for New Brunswick women. The effort necessary to achieve equality is a concert of effort of individual women, of groups of women and of government agencies. The effort is vast in our province. Women are working in all corners of our province, drawing on great talents and resourcefulness. A program such as the Secretary of State Women's Program, which is designed to augment and support the voluntary effort which already exists in the community, has fuelled the engine of the women's movement in this province.

The Advisory Council recently requested a list of grants provided by the Women's Program to New Brunswick women's groups since 1981-82. Our examination of this list demonstrates what we expected - that a wide variety of interests have been addressed in Women's Program funding. Here are examples: the rights of native women, single mothers, political action, battered women, women and health, pornography, sexual assault, women's resource centres, day care, women and alcoholism, women in education, young women, peace, women and work, equality under the law, women and social assistance, and women and mental health. Both project and operational funding have been received by groups in several regions of the province and by women of both official languages.

We were unable to contact every women's group that has received Women's Program funding. However, we would like to present the following testimonies from a cross-section of recipients:

Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). "New Brunswick Statute Audit". Gayle MacDonald, New Brunswick Director of LEAF:

"Women's Program's funds provided support for our audit of provincial labour legislation for compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Secretary of State Women's Programme is, by far, the most supportive branch of government we have encountered in our continuing struggle for equality. The Women's Programme shares our vision of Canada - a vision which promotes the equal treatment of women and men according to section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We strongly endorse the work of the Women's Programme and applaud their efforts to date."

Support for Single Mothers, Moncton. Nancy Hartling, Executive Director:

"The Women's Program of the Secretary of State has helped us reach our aims and objectives in several ways but particularly by assisting the seriously disadvantaged woman break down her barriers, learn new skills and help her cope in her role as a single mother. I believe the Women's Program should always keep in mind that the status of women and equality of women be priorities for projects."

New Brunswick Federation of Labour. "N.B.F.L. Policy Manual Re: Women's Issues". Kathryn-Ann Leger, Chairperson of N.B.F.L. Status of Women Committee:

"Prior to the creation of our reference manual, it took hours of research to get the same information we can now get in a matter of minutes, therefore keeping ourselves better informed. As a result, we are more able to provide information to the "policy makers" (i.e. executive, union members, and those in the labour movement) to make them more effective in dealing with women's concerns."

Women's Centre, Chatham (formerly Feminine Connection, Newcastle). Shirley Bohan, Coordinator:

"In our small communities, lots of people help out, but we could not have existed as we did without the help of the Women's Program. Our centres opened up a whole new world for so many women and created an awareness of the women's movement at the community level. It was satisfying then to know that we were affecting people and it is satisfying even today as we still hear about women who changed their lives as a result of coming to the Women's Centre. There is not a week that goes by that I don't hear about it."

Although we cannot provide an exact number of women's groups in New Brunswick, a measure of the extent of the women's movement is demonstrated by the length of the Council's mailing list. This list contains the names of women's groups and agencies concerned with women's issues. It now numbers 482. To appreciate the voluntary effort of women working for social change in our province, one need only pick up the local paper or listen to the local radio. The presence of women is being felt more and more. However, as we indicated earlier, we have much more work to do.

The Women's program is unique and valuable in that it augments an already existing force for social change. The women's movement in the province is a synergistic force comprised of many groups. The type of support that is provided by the Women's Program accelerates our progress toward the goal of equality because it enables us to work together more effectively. Let us provide you with a few examples: (1) Studies have shown the importance of reaching adolescent girls in the promotion of full equality for women. The Council has recently completed a study of the impact of cultural pressures on the health of adolescent girls. The Women's Program has also provided funding for projects whose particular focus was on adolescent girls. (2) The Council has recently completed a report to the provincial government on employment standards. This complements work carried out by LEAF New Brunswick and supported by the Women's Program that examined provincial labour legislation. (3) The Council has worked for many years to promote the use and support of Transition Houses in the province. Educational programs supported by the Women's Program that have educated the public about battered women and the role of shelters complement this work. Again these are but a few illustrative examples of how the work of New Brunswick women is enhanced by the Women's Program.

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It is the position of the Council that groups whose objectives do not support equality as defined under the Charter of Rights and whose programs do not promote improvement in the status of women should not be funded by the Secretary of State Women's Program.

R.E.A.L. Women, for example, claim that they want to end discrimination, to end the exploitation of women, to promote a

decent level of rights and opportunities, and to help the homemaker. However, their agenda for achieving these aims is unclear. R.E.A.L. Women also maintain that principles promoted by feminists would cause a deterioration of the moral fabric of society and have a detrimental effect on families and children. Yet, they have not demonstrated how these effects would result from feminism. Despite this gap in information, indeed misinformation, R.E.A.L. present these ideas as the twin pillars of their movement: (1) promotion of traditional family life and (2) the attack on feminism. R.E.A.L. Women, as well as other anti-feminist groups, offer little beyond these superficial generalities.

Even from these general statements it is not difficult to see that what anti-feminist groups promote is lack of choice. Such groups wish to prescribe what all women should be and to take away the freedom to be any other way. In contrast, feminists have drawn clear and explicit lines between lack of choice accorded women in society and their dependent, powerless position. We have already outlined above some of the resultant problems in maintaining such a position for women in society.

Another troubling aspect of the R.E.A.L. Women position is their claim to have between forty and forty-five thousand members in Canada. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women has informed us that their actual membership is closer to 2,800. In contrast, polls have shown that between seventy-five and eighty per cent of Canadians think that feminism is good. We have already presented evidence of the broad-based nature of the women's movement in our own province. It is doubtful that R.E.A.L. Women enjoy the support that they claim to have amongst Canadians.

Groups that do not promote the status of women in society - and by that we mean women's ability to participate on a par with men in any sphere of social, economic, and political life that they so choose - should not receive funding under the Secretary of State Women's Program. They may be eligible for funding under another program, but it is our firm belief that they do not qualify for funding under this one. To provide anti-feminist groups funding under the Women's Program would be to contribute to misunderstanding of equality and to work at cross purposes with those who truly wish to improve the status of women in Canadian society.

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The Government of Canada demonstrated its commitment to equality through the inclusion of Section 15 in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is the opinion of the Council that this commitment will be further strengthened by renewed support of the Secretary of State Women's Program.

All programs, including our own, can improve. For example, in the interests of equality, there may be room for improvement in the level of awareness about the Women's Program for all New Brunswick women. There may be a role for representatives of women's groups in the province to have further input into the current Program procedures. For example, representatives of women's groups could act in a formal advisory capacity, so that the Secretary of State is made aware, on a regular basis, of the priorities and concerns of a broad spectrum of women's groups. We would like to underline that this is not meant as a criticism of present arrangements. Rather, additional input from women's groups would complement the Secretary of State Women's Program, which has to date been very good for the women of this province.

I would like to thank the Chairperson and members of the Standing Committee on the Secretary of State for this opportunity to present the Advisory Council's position on the Women's Program. The Advisory Council would be pleased to be part of any further discussion of the Program, and of concepts that arise from the Committee's deliberations.

(Ce document est disponible en francais.)



